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Self and Personal Identity (R.) Sorabji *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*. Pp. xii + 400. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. Cased, £25. ISBN: 0-19-926639-5.

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SELF AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

SORABJI (R.) *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death*. Pp. xii + 400. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. Cased, £25. ISBN: 0-19-926639-5.

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The remarkable historical and philosophical range of S.'s book is reflected in its title: focussing on ancient conceptions of human individuality, self-awareness and personal identity (especially in Greek and Roman philosophy, with some detours in Eastern traditions), S. touches upon various ways in which these themes were discussed by some key figures in the subsequent history of philosophy, drawing some implications of these 'ancient and modern insights' for our conception of life and after-death destiny.

Although S. does not aim at exhaustiveness, and offers us a broad-brush *map* of the main ideas and arguments involved, the breadth of his treatment makes a detailed summary, let alone critical discussion, of his lengthy book impossible. I shall limit myself to highlighting some especially interesting and problematic proposals.

The opening Part 1 is devoted to the 'existence of self and philosophical development of the idea'. Against those who, by his account, deny the existence of a single self (e.g. some Buddhists, Hume, Nietzsche, Parfit) or give an exceedingly 'thin' account of it (e.g. Plato, Descartes, Locke), S. argues that some form of awareness of the self ('to see the world in terms of me and me again', p. 22) is *needed* because of its survival function both in personal and in evolutionary terms; we must identify the self with the embodied *owner* of psychological and physical states and events rather than with an 'ownerless' 'stream' or 'bundle' of such states and events (vs Parfit) or 'an undetectable soul or immaterial ego' (vs Plato and Descartes). Although 'this need is no proof of existence', S. believes 'it does create an onus of disproof' on those who claim that its object is illusory (p. 22). S. proceeds to argue against the scholarly view that interest in selfhood is missing from early Greek philosophy; he surveys the ways in which the persistence of individuals over time was denied (e.g. by Epicharmus, according to whom material bodily change over time implied a loss of identity) and defended (e.g. by the Stoics), and the 'true self' was variously identified with an impersonal rational soul or intellect (in the Platonic tradition [cf. Part 3, Chapter 6]), practical reason (Aristotle), or 'will' (Epictetus). This part sets the tone and pace for the whole book, reflecting its strengths and weaknesses. S. touches upon an astonishing variety of ancient and modern authors, texts and arguments, with a refreshing personal voice, backed by a perceptive use of a large amount of literature. The price paid for this breadth is, at times, some lack of depth in exegetical and philosophical analysis. With few exceptions, for example, the primary texts are paraphrased and summarised rather than analysed, and the sourcebook-style choice of reporting most of them only *after* his discussion does not help readers appreciate their richness.

Part 2 is devoted to some ancient and modern discussions of what ensures personal identity over time, including the Aristotelian and Stoic responses to the Epicharmus-style 'Growing Argument', the Stoic idea that the same individuals (or counterparts of them) will inhabit future cosmic cycles, the fascinating early Christian debate on the material constitution of the resurrected body, the role of memory for personal identity (with focus on Epicureans, Stoics and Locke), and Parfit's contention that material continuity, and even identity, do not really 'matter'. This is

the high point of the book; S. connects different strands of the philosophical tradition and makes ancient and modern philosophers dialogue in fecund and thought-provoking ways. If anything, we would want to hear more about S.'s own opinions and reasons, which often are simply stated or roughly sketched rather than carefully developed and argued. For example, S. claims, matter-of-factly, that 'our greater readiness to accept splitting ... than ... teletransportation' (p. 89) speaks against the Parfitian view that physical continuity is not crucial, provided there is enough psychological continuity between our past and present 'selves'. This is surprising: I doubt that, for the sake of physical continuity, the majority of us would prefer 'splitting', i.e. having half of our brain (with only a portion of our psychological states and capacities) transplanted into a different body, over 'teletransportation', i.e. having our whole body (brain included) annihilated and a brand new one, made of numerically distinct particles of matter but with *exactly the same* psychophysical features, instantly recreated by a machine somewhere else. This reviewer would definitely opt for the latter option, like generations of Star Trek fans who are not disturbed by their heroes' presumed loss of personal identity in virtually every episode (here S. seems to come as close to Epicharmus as Parfit is to Hume, and it is difficult to argue that he is thereby in better company). This raises a more stringent question concerning S.'s style of argument: are our ordinary intuitions about personal identity and survival conclusive evidence for or against philosophical theories of the self? I am not suggesting that they can not be, but some preliminary reflection on this methodological issue would be needed.

After discussing the idea that individuals are bundles of properties and some ancient proposals concerning their differentiation (Part 3), S. devotes Part 4 to the emergence of the notion of ethical *personae* in first-century B.C. Stoicism, to Plutarch's suggestion that we constitute ourselves through memory, and to Epictetus' identification of the true self with our inviolable 'will' (*proairesis*). S. competently touches upon an array of fascinating texts and ideas, but the danger of imposing on the ancient material such an ill-defined concept as that of 'self' emerges at times. For example, in *On tranquillity* 473b–474b Plutarch does not seem to me to claim, or even suggest, that painstaking exercise of memory and self-reflection is crucial to *constitute* our own *self*, or even our own *persona*; it will make our *present life* better, i.e. more tranquil and self-sufficient, by weaving it in a unified whole.

Part 5 discusses some ancient puzzles concerning the possibility and origin of self-knowledge and self-awareness (one noticeable absence is the 'Elusive Argument' used against the Stoic conception of sagehood). S.'s proposal that, independently of its mechanism, self-awareness must come from natural selection, given its survival function, is puzzling: countless vegetal and animal species have been most successful in evolutionary terms in the absence of self-awareness (unless we weaken this notion to such an extent as to make it irrelevant here), so S. needs to explain why things differ for the human species.

In Part 6 S. engages more closely with Parfit's idea that we are streams of psycho-physical events occurring in a body, and that speaking of *owners* of these is a mere *façon de parler*: the payoff of this realisation will diminish selfishness and fear of the (supposed) 'loss of self' at death. S. outlines a battery of arguments against this reductionist view: ownerless streams cannot be univocally unified or differentiated, and agency and moral responsibility presuppose continuing owners. These arguments deserve careful scrutiny that I cannot undertake here (e.g. does Parfit's position really imply that 'I-thoughts' should be abandoned, or considered illusory?). What I find less convincing is S.'s alternative: what is *exactly* the 'embodied owner of

psychological and physical states'? We are told that it is not an immaterial soul, but in what sense then is it something over and above those states and body? What kind of 'ownership' is S. postulating? I am not claiming that no convincing answer can be given, but that S. fails to tackle these and other fundamental questions. The final chapter of Part 6 is an overview of some sophisticated Buddhist attempts to reduce the self to psycho-physical streams, or even eliminate it.

The final Part 7 discusses some ways in which our selves have been supposed to enjoy after-death survival (reincarnation, disembodied survival, resurrection, circular time), outlining conceptual difficulties for all (e.g. what kind of life could a disembodied self have?) and examining whether, anyway, it is rational to feel dismay at the prospect of *not* surviving. S.'s protreptic suggestion is that, although not rationally justified (as some Epicurean arguments show), such a fear is 'programmed' into us by natural selection; philosophy cannot 'remove it, but it can keep it in check and prevent it from growing', improving the quality of our lives, which is what really matters (p. 341).

S.'s book is an inspiring example of how one can do philosophy and history of philosophy in the same breath, and a reminder of the rewards and difficulties of such an enterprise, especially when it is carried on with as ambitious a scope as S.'s. While S. has the merit of offering us a reliable large-scale map of a vast and fascinating philosophical terrain, he does not always succeed in constructing a unified narrative integrating the various historical and philosophical threads he identifies. This might suggest that no such single story can be told, because there is no unified perspective on the 'self' to be distilled from the texts; however, at least an attempt to tackle the issue in a general conclusion would have been welcome. S.'s book is an invaluable mine of texts, ideas, arguments and bibliographical references on a coherent set of perennial philosophical problems, and will not fail to inspire readers, who will want to use it as a launch pad for more localised and in-depth studies. Despite the reservations expressed above, S.'s book commands the attention of a variegated readership: classicists and students of ancient philosophy will find S.'s constant integration of ancient and modern perspectives refreshing and stimulating, philosophers will gain from a better sense of the historical dimension of certain familiar concerns, ideas and arguments, and non-specialists will be introduced to the wonders and challenges of (the history of) philosophy through the distinctive voice of an original intellectual.

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ARISTOTLE, METAPHYSICS AND ETHICS

BROADIE (S.) *Aristotle and Beyond. Essays on Metaphysics and Ethics*. Pp. x + 203. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Cased, £45, US\$85. ISBN: 978-0-521-87024-5.

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In view of the order of the twelve articles that make up this fine collection, the title is slightly misleading: it is not a progression from Aristotle to *beyond* but rather from